

AMERICA'S DEBT TAX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. OLSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, today President Obama and Senate Leader REID got what they wanted—the Federal Government is shut down.

House Republicans made four attempts to avoid a shutdown; all were denied a straight up-and-down vote in the United States Senate. And now they won't even agree to a conference committee to work out the differences between the two bodies, per the Constitution.

Given this “my way or the highway” mentality, I want to briefly talk to the American people about what to expect in a bigger fiscal crisis, our impending default on the Federal Government's legal obligations by exceeding our debt limit. Without agreement between the President and Congress in a few weeks, America will default on its obligations for the first time in its history. And I fear that our President and congressional Democrats will play politics with our debt ceiling like they did with going with a government shutdown.

And here are the words of a key player in this debate on increasing our debt ceiling. This was a speech in Congress on March 16, 2006:

The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. It is a sign that the U.S. Government can't pay its own bills. It is a sign that we now depend on ongoing financial assistance from foreign countries to finance our government's reckless fiscal policies. Over the past 5 years, our Federal debt has increased by \$3.5 trillion to \$8.6 trillion. That is ‘trillion’ with a ‘T.’ That is money that we have borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, borrowed from China and Japan, borrowed from the American taxpayers. And over the next 5 years, between now and 2011, the President's budget will increase the debt by another \$3.5 trillion.

And the cost of our debt is one of the fastest growing expenses in the Federal budget. This rising debt is a hidden domestic enemy, robbing our cities and States of critical investments in infrastructure.

Every dollar we pay in interest is a dollar that is not going to investment in America's priorities. Instead, interest payments are a significant tax on all Americans—a debt tax that Washington doesn't want to talk about. If Washington was serious about honest tax relief in this country, we would see an effort to reduce our national debt by returning to responsible fiscal policies.

Our debt also matters internationally. Now, there is nothing wrong with borrowing from foreign countries. But we must remember that the more we depend on foreign nations to lend us money, the more our economic security is tied to the whims of foreign leaders whose interests might not be aligned with ours.

And finally:

Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that ‘the buck stops here.’ Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. America deserves better.

I, therefore, intend to oppose the effort to increase America's debt limit.

Those words were the words of Senator Barack Obama. Senator Obama is now our President. Unfortunately, President Obama has forgotten his words as a Senator.

In his first 4 years in office, he added more to our national debt than all the Presidents combined in the history of America. And now, instead of working with Congress to fix this debt crisis and the drivers of this debt—the entitlement programs, our President is demanding a naked increase in our debt ceiling.

Mr. President, the government did not have to shut down today. Mr. President, America does not need to go into default. Work with us, please.

CELEBRATING THE OPENING OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, well, today is a historic day in our country. Despite a Republican-led government shutdown that was completely unnecessary, we are celebrating the opening of the Affordable Care Act or, as I affectionately call it, ObamaCare.

You know, after almost 100 years of fighting to expand universal access to health insurance coverage in the United States of America, in 2010, Congress finally passed, the President signed, and the Supreme Court upheld ObamaCare as the law of the land. And starting today, Americans will be able to learn about the health plan choices and the financial assistance that is going to be available to them. An army of in-person assisters have been trained and stand ready to help Americans understand their options and enroll in coverage that best meets their needs.

Americans can go to healthcare.gov, or in Illinois, where I'm from, getcoveredillinois.gov is up and running.

Now I have heard from colleagues on the other side, all these scare things about how terrible ObamaCare is going to be for the country and for individuals. Let me read to you some constituent letters that I have received.

This is from Gayle Weiss. She says:

I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in 1997 and have consistently been denied affordable insurance since that time.

I am so excited that our President has taken steps to help all Americans with access to health care. It's so fitting that tomorrow is my 59th birthday, and what a fantastic birthday gift. Finally, I won't have to worry about losing everything I've worked so hard for if, God forbid, I suffer a catastrophic health issue. No one should have to risk their future for something they have no control over, like illness.

I heard from David Zoltan. He is 34 years old. This is what he writes:

One week before Lehman Brothers went under, I was laid off from my job at the time and spent the next 2 years without health insurance. As a diabetic, the scariest thing in the world is to go without health insurance.

Insulin averages around \$100 to \$120 per bottle, and I need approximately three bottles each of two kinds of insulin every month to live. I had to rely on my doctors to help me apply for any charity care program we could find or beg for the very medicines I needed to survive on a daily basis. Even so, I had to visit the hospital emergency room several times just to get insulin when my doctors couldn't get me free medication.

ObamaCare gave me the preexisting condition plan pools as a lifeline until better solutions were available.

ObamaCare has done so much for me, and I'm proud today to see the beginning of the largest expansion of health care in my lifetime. There will be problems to fix, but we are America. We will fix these problems. We will give the precious necessity of health security to our citizens. We will prevail.

And then I also heard from Eva Strobeck. She said:

I used to get insurance from my husband, who retires in January. I am one of those people for whom it is impossible to get insurance independently. I have three illnesses. ObamaCare makes it possible to get insurance at an affordable rate, which I cannot do without. My psychological medications alone cost about \$5,000 per month. I can't survive without ObamaCare. It must be funded by Congress.

So I want to say that this effort to defund something that will bring life-saving health care to millions of Americans, about 30 million Americans who either have to go bankrupt, who have to pay exorbitant prices, or simply have to do without health insurance, who would be against that? Are there going to be glitches in the program? Of course there are.

Medicare part D had news article after news article talking about the problems of this health benefit for the elderly. Let's get on with it and provide health care for all Americans starting today.

THE UNSUSTAINABLE PATH OF OUR BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, we are here this morning. Many in the Nation have questions about how we arrived at this point. It's not that complex. Different people across the country elect people to represent their viewpoints. Even across my own State, the viewpoints vary widely. I probably represent five or six different demographics, different economic engines, different needs. We are sent here to make decisions, to make hard decisions.

One of the toughest things that the Nation faces right now is that we are on an unsustainable path in our United States budget. Those are not my words. They are the words of a specialist, the economist that we hired to tell us such things just last week, noting that what we're doing is not sustainable.

The one side, I recognized their viewpoints, that they should provide more for more people. Other viewpoints are